WHAT IS CLAIMED:

1. A method for providing data files to a remote user over a channel comprising:
determining the speed of a channel;
using said speed, estimating the transfer time for a data file;
responsive to said transfer time, determining whether to transfer said data file or a compressed version of said data file; and
transferring said data file or a compressed version of said data file, based on said determining.

2. A method according to claim 1 wherein said determining the speed of a channel comprises:
sending a test on said channel; and
detecting the transfer time of said test on said channel.

3. A method according to claim 1 wherein said determining the speed of a channel is initiated when a request is received from a user to download a large digital file.

4. A method according to claim 1 wherein said data files include at least one file of at least one file type from the group consisting of:
digitally encoded audio files,
digitally encoded video files,
digitally encoded text, and
digitally encoded images.

5. ~~A method according to claim 1 wherein said sending a test is initiated in response~~ to a user login.

6. A method according to claim 1 further comprising:
receiving an indication from a user system as to what compression formats are decodable by said user system.

7. A method according to claim 1 further comprising:
transmitting to a user system an applet required to access a compressed file.

8. A method according to claim 1 further comprising:

transmitting to a user system data representing a list indicating available data files and indicating estimated transfer times for said data files and for compressed versions of a data file; and

receiving a user selection of a data file indicating a desired transfer delay.

9. A method according to claim 1 further comprising:

comparing a transfer time for a data file to a threshold;

transferring a compressed file instead of said large digital data file if said transfer time exceeds said threshold.

10. A method according to claim 9 wherein said threshold is configurable as a maximum acceptable delay.

11. A method according to claim 9 further comprising:

if a time for transmitting a file exceeds a threshold, converting a file to another format.

12. A method for providing remotely accessible multimedia messages comprising:

determining the speed of a channel;

determining the transfer time for available messages and attachments using the size of available messages and attachments and said speed;

providing data representing a list of available messages to a user, wherein at least one listed message with a transit time greater than a threshold is provided with at least two compression options; and

receiving from a user data indicating a desired compression option.

13. A method according to claim 12 wherein said determining the speed of a channel comprises:

sending a test on said channel; and

detecting the transfer time of said test on said channel.

14. A method according to claim 12 wherein said multimedia messages include at least one file of at least one file type from the group consisting of:

digitally encoded voice messages,

digitally encoded email messages,

digitally encoded video messages, and

facsimiles.

15. A method according to claim 12 further comprising:

receiving an indication from a user system as to what compression formats are decodable by said user system;

when necessary, transmitting to a user system an applet required to access a compressed file.

16. A method according to claim 12 further comprising:

using user access patterns and information and system information to determine whether to compress messages before a server is connected to by a user and to determine whether to delete precompressed messages when system resources are low.

17. A server system able to communicate adjustable sized messages to a client comprising:

an interface (220) able to connect over a channel (110) or an optional channel (110a) to a user system;

a test (140) sent over an active channel to determine a channel speed;

a timer (240) able to determine said transit speed;

two or more message files (252) of a determined size, selectable for presentation; and

one or more compressed message files (254), alternatively selectable for presentation.

18. An apparatus according to claim 17 further comprising:

analysis logic for determining whether to compress messages prior to access by a user, based on user parameters.

19. An apparatus according to claim 17 wherein said apparatus is embodied into a fixed media containing logic instructions that when loaded into appropriately configured computer systems will cause the system to embody said server.

20. A method for presenting to a user a list (400) of messages for interacting with a multimedia message server comprising:

presenting to a user an identification (402) of a message available for transfer;

presenting, for said message, an indication of a first transfer time (410) and a second transfer time (412), said second transfer time indicating time for transfer of a compressed message; and

registering a user action indicating a compression option to be transferred.